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# Your United States Department of Agriculture

*How it  
serves people  
on the FARM  
and in the  
COMMUNITY  
NATION  
WORLD*

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U.S. Department  
of Agriculture  
Office of Communication  
PA-824

# **Your United States Department of Agriculture**

## **Its Broad Responsibilities**

Your U.S. Department of Agriculture serves all Americans daily. It works to improve and maintain farm income and to develop and expand markets abroad for agricultural products. The Department helps to curb and cure poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. It works to enhance the environment and to maintain our capacity to produce by helping landowners to protect soil, water, forests, and other natural resources. Department programs in the fields of rural development, credit, and conservation are key resources in carrying out national growth policies. Its research findings are of direct or indirect benefit to all Americans. The Department, through inspection and grading services, safeguards and assures standards of quality in the daily food supply.

This pamphlet summarizes the work of the Department of Agriculture.

## **How It Started**

Abraham Lincoln signed the congressional act creating the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1862. A little more than a quarter century later, Agriculture became the eighth executive department to achieve Cabinet rank. In those early days, the Department served a population almost entirely engaged in agriculture as a livelihood. A farmer in Lincoln's time produced only enough farm products to supply himself and three or four others.

Today's Department serves a Nation in which less than 5 percent of the population lives on farms—a Nation in which each agricultural worker provides food and fiber for himself and over 50 others.

## **Relationship to Land-Grant Colleges**

In 1862 Congress passed, and President Lincoln signed, the Land-Grant College Act. This act donated

11 million acres of public lands to the States and Territories to provide colleges for the benefit of agriculture and the mechanical arts.

In 1887 Congress authorized an agricultural experiment station in each State and Territory.

In 1914 it established the *Cooperative Extension Service* for each State to extend agricultural and home economics research information of the Department and land-grant colleges to farmers and other people.

These acts were followed by others to strengthen the college teaching experimental and extension activities of the States.

These agencies, in cooperation with the Department, have made American agriculture the most productive, and the consumer's food the least expensive in terms of disposable income, the world has seen. The land-grant colleges and universities, totaling 70, with at least one in every State, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia, in cooperation with the *Extension Service* and experiment stations, work to improve every aspect of agricultural production and distribution.

## ACTIVITIES OF USDA

### Research

USDA works closely on research with State experiment stations, State departments of agriculture, schools of forestry, farmer cooperatives, and other public and private agencies. It administers Federal grant funds voted by Congress for the States.

The *Agricultural Research Service* carries out research on crops, livestock, soil and water conservation, agricultural engineering, control of insects and other pests, human nutrition, and home economics. ARS also develops new and expanded uses for farm commodities; conducts and administers a research program using the physical and biological sciences to solve problems of market quality, transportation, and facilities.

The *Cooperative State Research Service* administers (under the Hatch Act of 1955 and the McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Research Act of 1962) Federal grant payments for research at the agricultural experiment stations and eligible schools of forestry. CSRS also assists State experiment stations, land-grant

colleges, and USDA agencies in planning and coordinating scientific research programs.

The *Economic Research Service* does research in general economic and statistical analysis, marketing economics, farm and resource economics, and foreign economic analysis.

The *Farmer Cooperative Service* conducts economic research to help farmers market their products and purchase supplies. It also helps all rural people to obtain other business services through cooperatives.

The *Farmer Cooperative Service* reaches farmers and other rural people by conducting educational work to help them improve the effectiveness of their cooperatives. In these activities it cooperates with land-grant colleges, State extension offices, county agents, and cooperatives and their State and national organizations.

The *Forest Service* carries on a broad research program through its eight regional forest experiment stations, the Forest Products Laboratory, and the Institute of Tropical Forestry. In these laboratories, scientists study the establishment, improvement, growth, and harvesting of timber; protection of forests from fire, insects, diseases, and animal pests; management of rangelands; improvement and management of wildlife habitat; forest recreation; protection and management of watersheds; efficient marketing and utilization of forest products; forest engineering; forest genetics; and forest economics. A continuing forest survey provides comprehensive information on the extent and condition of forest lands, the volume and quality of timber resources, trends in timber growth and harvest, and the outlook for future supplies and demands.

## Education

The *Cooperative Extension Service* is the field educational arm of the Department of Agriculture and land-grant universities and colleges. Federal, State, and local governments jointly sponsor and finance its work. The *Extension Service* staff represents USDA in this activity.

In nearly all counties, extension workers conduct educational programs to help families learn about and apply new research findings and technological

developments to the everyday problems of living and making a living. The major areas included in the educational efforts are efficient production and marketing of agricultural products; improved family living, including nutrition; 4-H youth development; and rural development.

The *National Agricultural Library*, Beltsville, Maryland (intersection of I-495 and U.S. 1 at Exit 27, North) contains 1.3 million volumes on agriculture, biology, chemistry, and other subjects supporting agricultural research. Probably the most extensive agricultural library in existence, it collects and maintains worldwide publications in the agricultural, biological, and chemical sciences; serves the research, extension, regulatory, and other programs of the USDA and State agricultural agencies; extends services to other libraries, institutions, and the public; and provides, at cost, microfilm and photocopy of material in the collection.

## **Information**

Each USDA agency provides information on its work for farmers, consumers, and others. The *Office of Communication* coordinates:

*Publications*, technical and popular, which present research results and program, regulatory, and other information on the work of USDA.

*Current information*, which includes press, radio, and television materials and special reports.

*Visuals*, which include exhibits, photos, graphics, and motion pictures.

## **Marketing and Consumer Services**

The *Commodity Exchange Authority* keeps watch over and investigates traders' and brokers' operations on commodity exchanges to prevent price manipulation and fraud and to safeguard producer and consumer interests in pricing and marketing services of exchanges.

The *Agricultural Marketing Service* (AMS) helps the private marketing system move food and other farm products from producer to consumer quickly and efficiently, with fairness to all, through a group of related programs.

AMS establishes standards for grades indicating the quality of a large number of farm products. It provides



grading services for many products—most of them voluntary and paid for by the person or firm requesting the service. Similarly, it operates acceptance services to make sure that commodities meet the contract specifications agreed to by individual firms. And it collects market news daily on farm product prices and movement in the major markets for various qualities of products.

AMS strengthens farm income and expands the market for farm products by promoting increased consumption of foods in temporary overabundance, and by purchasing foods in excess supply for distribution through programs of the Food and Nutrition Service.

AMS helps farmers get reasonable rates and services for transportation of their products by presenting information to the Interstate Commerce Commission. It also promotes fair play in marketing through administration of the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act, the U. S. Warehouse Act, the Federal Seed Act, the Plant Variety Protection Act, and the Agricultural Fair Practices Act.

Through marketing agreements and orders, AMS puts a floor under prices received by farmers for milk, and helps regulate the volume or quality of fruits and vegetables coming to market from areas and commodities coming under the orders.

AMS also helps State departments of agriculture develop better ways of marketing through the Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program. In fact, many AMS programs are carried out in cooperation with the States. The agency also publishes marketing guides for several commodities to help producers bring supplies into balance with demand at a reasonable price.

Consumers also benefit from many of these programs that help to assure adequate, dependable supplies of food and other farm products, marketed quickly and economically.

The *Food and Nutrition Service* leads the Nation's effort to wipe out poverty-related hunger and malnutrition. Its Food Stamp and Food Distribution Programs help provide food to poor families, both through the regular food marketing system and through a direct distribution system. Its Child Nutrition Programs help to feed children through the National



School Lunch Program, School Breakfasts, Special Milk, and other child-feeding activities in preschool centers and summer programs. When hurricanes and other natural disasters strike, resources of all these FNS programs are quickly adapted to aid its victims.

The *Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service* (APHIS) helps to safeguard the health and quality of the Nation's animals and plants, and protect consumers by maintaining a strong system of Federal-State inspection of meat and poultry products for wholesomeness and truthful labeling.

Protection of our farm and food products begins at the ports of entry, where APHIS maintains close surveillance of all animal and plant imports, cargoes, and passengers' baggage to prevent the entry of anything that might harbor a foreign pest or disease of animals and plants.

APHIS cooperates with the States and the agricultural industry to eradicate and control animal diseases of national importance. In addition to the protection this provides to the Nation's farmers, it helps to guard all Americans from those diseases which can be transmitted from animals to man.

The agency also cooperates with the States and industry to control or eradicate native or alien pests and diseases of plants which pose an interstate menace. Close surveillance is maintained nationwide of pest infestations to identify potential problems and organize effective control programs.

Typical of these cooperative activities are the current campaigns to control the gypsy moth, which is capable of defoliating shade trees and forests; the imported fire ant, a severe nuisance to animals and humans; the screwworm, a flesh-eating menace of livestock, wildlife, and all other warm-blooded animals; and the cereal leaf beetle, which can cause severe damage to small grains.

APHIS also licenses the manufacture and marketing of veterinary biologics to ensure their purity and effectiveness. In its role as a regulatory agency, it enforces the laws requiring humane treatment of dogs, cats, and other small animals used for research; zoo animals and those used in exhibitions; and horses.

The agency further administers the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act, which, together, provide for a uniform Federal-

State system of inspection for all meat and poultry products. Federal inspection requires advance approval of the construction and equipment of all plants operating in interstate commerce; continuous inspection of all processing operations; thorough inspection of all animals and birds before, during, and after slaughter; and advance approval of all packages and labeling of meat and poultry products. It also includes surveillance to guard against illegal residues of chemicals and inspection of all imported meat and poultry comparable to that given to domestic production.

In addition, the laws require that States must maintain inspection systems for meat and poultry produced and sold within their own boundaries that are equal to Federal inspection, or USDA must assume responsibility for all inspection in a State.

The *Packers and Stockyards Administration* administers the Packers and Stockyards Act, helps to maintain free and open competition in the marketing of the Nation's livestock, poultry, and meat production.

The P&S Act prohibits unfair, deceptive, discriminatory, and monopolistic marketing practices which would deprive the farmer of a fair price for his product, deprive the marketer of a reasonable profit for his services, and would unduly affect consumer prices for meat and poultry.

## **Trade and Aid**

The *Foreign Agricultural Service* (FAS) administers USDA foreign programs in the interest of U.S. agriculture with special emphasis on market promotion abroad. Attachés at 60 foreign posts maintain a constant flow of world agricultural information.

FAS is charged with increasing U.S. farm exports. It accomplishes its mission by export credit sales through Commodity Credit Corporation, private trade credit sales, and government-to-government credit sales under P.L. 480; by barter; and by the handling of commodity sales through regular commercial channels. Export payment assistance is provided to bring export prices on certain commodities such as wheat and rice within competitive ranges.

## **Economics**

The *Economic Research Service* analyzes factors affecting farm production and their relationship to the environment, prices and income, and the outlook for various commodities. It studies production efficiency; marketing costs and potentials; rural development and natural resources; agricultural trade, production, and Government policies.

The *Statistical Reporting Service* reports on crop and livestock production and prices paid and received by farmers, conducts surveys of consumer purchases and attitudes, and keeps statistical methods used by USDA accurate and responsive to changing needs.

## **Soil, Water, and Forest Conservation**

The *Soil Conservation Service* (SCS) develops and carries out a national soil and water conservation program through 3,000 local conservation districts that have 2.2 million cooperating landowners and operators. This agency also provides USDA leadership for watershed projects, the Great Plains conservation program, resource conservation and development projects, income-producing recreation enterprises, river basin investigations, and the National Inventory of Soil and Water Conservation Needs. In addition, SCS administers the Federal part of the National Cooperative Soil Survey, and makes and coordinates snow surveys for water supply forecasting in the Western States. SCS also gives technical help in support of the national agricultural conservation program. In recent years the services of SCS specialists have been used more and more by State, county, and local governments; planning and zoning agencies; and other institutions and organizations in rapidly developing areas to insure proper land and water management. These services take the form of assistance to nonfarm groups in such activities as the provision of municipal and industrial water supply, highway construction, housing developments, recreation facilities, sanitary landfills, school site development, and strip-mine reclamation.

The *Forest Service* is another USDA agency primarily concerned with protection and development of our natural resources. The Forest Service

administers 154 national forests and 19 national grasslands containing 186 million acres in 41 States and Puerto Rico. These lands are managed for multiple use and sustained yield of all the renewable natural resources including timber, water, forage, special products, fish and wildlife, natural beauty, and outdoor recreation.

Besides this, the Forest Service cooperates with State agencies and private forest owners (1) to protect the 450 million acres of State and privately owned forests and critical watersheds against fire, insects, and diseases; (2) to encourage better forest practices for multiple use and profit on the 367 million acres of private forest land; (3) to aid in production and distribution of planting stock for the forest and shelterbelt planting; (4) to provide technical assistance in utilization and marketing of forest products; and (5) to stimulate proper management of State, county, and community forests.

## **Stabilization**

The *Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service* (ASCS) is responsible for administering—

- \* Programs to maintain balanced but ample production of wheat, and of feed grains, by providing to cooperators loans, purchases, and price guarantees.

- \* The cotton program to assure adequate but not excessive supplies through loans, purchases, and price guarantees.

- \* Acreage allotments and marketing quotas, when applicable under law to certain major crops, to help keep supplies in line with demand.

- \* Loans, purchases, and payments for various other commodities specified by law, and the management of commodity inventories.

- \* The Sugar Act and the National Wool Act.

- \* Programs to help obtain adequate farm and commercial storage and drying equipment for farm products.

- \* Cost sharing with farmers to install needed soil, water, woodland, and wildlife, and wildlife conserving practices and pollution prevention and abatement practices on long-term communitywide benefit under the Rural Environmental Conservation Program (RECP).

- \* Programs to assist farmers in designated areas

during natural disasters and other emergencies. ASCS is assigned specific emergency preparedness responsibilities, and carries out departmentwide defense coordinating activities, including the servicing of USDA State and county emergency boards. Through its State and county offices, ASCS conducts monitoring activities during periods of anticipated shortages on fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, and other key farm production items in order to prevent hardships due to shortages.

ASCS also assists the Food and Nutrition Service in the distribution of commodities through domestic channels.

The *Commodity Credit Corporation*, with its \$14.5 billion borrowing authority, finances the commodity stabilization program, domestic and export surplus commodity disposal, foreign assistance, storage activities, and related programs and operations of the Department.

The *Federal Crop Insurance Corporation* provides farmers with all-risk insurance that repays crop production costs lost because of bad weather, insects, disease, and other unavoidable natural causes. This keeps the rural economy going in those years when drought or other natural disasters cut crop yields and leave farmers with a short crop or no crop to sell. FCIC protection is available in more than one-third of the Nation's farm counties. As farming becomes more of a credit operation, Federal Crop Insurance policies are becoming increasingly important as collateral for crop production loans.

## **Rural Development**

Rural development is a cooperative process in which public agencies, private organizations, and citizen leaders work together to improve community facilities and services and economic opportunities for people living in the towns and farming communities of nonmetropolitan America. To accomplish this the Department's program centers on: *people building* (providing services and facilities needed to stimulate human development), *community facilities* (combining city conveniences with the advantages of country living), *environmental improvement* (protecting and improving our assets), and *economic development* (increasing farm and business investment to create jobs).



Under the Rural Development Act of 1972, the U. S. Department of Agriculture has responsibility for coordinating a nationwide rural development program utilizing services and aids of other Federal departments and agencies in cooperation with States and localities.

The Assistant Secretary for Rural Development of the Department is in charge of key programs contributing to rural development and also serves as chairman of the National Rural Development Committee. This group establishes policies, sets priorities, and coordinates programs of the Department which contribute to the development of rural areas.

The Department of Agriculture's role in a national rural development program is of critical importance. The Department is the central point for coordination and leadership in the Federal Government of activities benefiting rural communities. The Department also administers a wide variety of financial, technical, and educational services that directly assist State and local governments and citizen leaders to develop community goals. These include:

Program coordination and leadership—*Rural Development Service*.

Supervised credit for farming, conservation, home construction, public works, and business and industrial development—*Farmers Home Administration*.

Financial and technical assistance for public and cooperative electric and telephone facilities—*Rural Electrification Administration*.

Research at the State and regional level on technical, economic, and social aspects of rural community improvement and project development—*Cooperative State Research Service* in cooperation with State experiment stations.

Educational programs to inform local officials and citizen leaders of methods to improve their communities and solve basic problems related to community growth and environmental protection—*Cooperative Extension Service*.

Assistance to the States in promoting wise conservation and development of State, local, and private forestry resources which are critically important in the development of some rural areas, and management of the national forest lands for maximum benefit to all the people, with particular concern for the impact of



national forest activities on the rural communities where they are located—*Forest Service*.

Financial, technical, and administrative assistance in the conservation and development of soil, water, and other natural resources in rural areas. This includes technical assistance in land-use planning and areawide resource conservation and development programs and financial assistance for a variety of basic measures to improve soil and water conservation and development—*Soil Conservation Service*.

Technical assistance to cooperative enterprises processing and marketing farm products and to other cooperatively owned, rural-based industries—*Farmer Cooperative Service*.

Research on factors affecting rural development and natural resources, findings of which are used widely by Federal, State, and local officials engaged in rural development programs—*Economic Research Service*.

Many other agencies of the Department also contribute to various aspects of the program in such fields as market development and food distribution to improve the diets of low-income rural people and others.

In each State there is a rural development committee composed of Department of Agriculture's cooperating State agencies, and in many States volunteer citizen groups are represented. These committees develop joint programs and activities within the State to use all appropriate Federal and State resources in rural development.

## **Credit**

The *Farmers Home Administration* provides vital financial assistance to rural America through the multi-billion-dollar loan and grant programs. The agency approaches rural development through major avenues: (1) Encouraging and supporting family farm ownership and operation to provide an economic and social base for rural society; (2) Providing modest, but adequate modern housing—individually owned rental apartments; (3) Installing needed community facilities, such as water and waste disposal systems, firefighting facilities, community centers, streets, health services, and other needed amenities; (4) Providing economic support to farmers and homeowners affected by

disaster; and (5) Fostering economic development with loans for business and industrial enterprises.

## Emergency Programs

USDA defense and major natural disaster programs are coordinated through USDA State and county emergency boards as directed by an assistant to the Secretary. Those administering programs to feed people and to help farmers affected by floods, drought, and other natural disasters would use this experience to meet USDA responsibilities in the event of nuclear war. In the national defense program, USDA is responsible for food from the farm through the wholesale level, fire control in rural areas, and biological and chemical warfare defense for animals and crops.

## HOW USDA IS ORGANIZED

SECRETARY

Under Secretary

Deputy Under Secretaries

Staff Assistants

Judicial Officer

Office of Communication

Office of the General Counsel

Office of Investigation

Office of Intergovernmental Affairs

Office of Planning and Evaluation

Departmental Administration

Assistant Secretary for Administration

Office of Administrative Law Judges

Office of Audit

Office of Management and Finance

Office of Equal Opportunity

Office of Automated Data Systems

Office of Personnel

Office of Operations

Agricultural Economics

Director

Staff Economist

Farmer Cooperative Service

Statistical Reporting Service

Economic Research Service

International Affairs and Commodity Programs  
Assistant Secretary  
Agricultural Stabilization and  
Conservation Service  
Commodity Credit Corporation  
Federal Crop Insurance Corporation  
Foreign Agricultural Service

Marketing and Consumer Services  
Assistant Secretary  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection  
Service  
Commodity Exchange Authority  
Food and Nutrition Service  
Packers and Stockyards  
Administration

Rural Development  
Assistant Secretary  
Farmers Home Administration  
Rural Development Service  
Rural Electrification Administration  
Rural Telephone Bank

Conservation, Research and Education  
Assistant Secretary  
Agricultural Research Service  
Cooperative State Research Service  
Extension Service  
Forest Service  
National Agricultural Library  
Soil Conservation Service

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